

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

July 1, 2005

The Week Ahead

Mon., July 4 – Independence Day holiday. State offices closed.

DCS Youth Excels in Track and Field

Submitted by The Juvenile Justice Division



James J. poses with one of his recent trophies for his excellence in track and field.

When it comes to running, James J. excels at it. The Juvenile Justice Division proudly congratulates James J. on his recent sports achievements and upcoming events. He recently competed in the Oak Ridge High School Sectionals and placed fifth in the 100 meter. James and his teammates also won the 4 x 100 relay, which gave them the opportunity to compete in the TSSAA state meet in Memphis in late May, where they finished eighth. James also competed in the USATF Tennessee Association Junior Olympic Championships in Nashville at Tennessee State University on June 18-19, placing third, which has given him the opportunity to compete in the USATF regional meet in Hoover, Ala. on July 7-10. If James finishes in the top three in Alabama, he will qualify for the National Junior Olympics in Indianapolis, Ind.

James is also a participant of the Knoxville Track Club, whose team has posted the fifth fastest time in the country with a time of 41.7 seconds in the 4 x 100 relay. James has been invited to compete in the USA Track & Field National Championships in Knoxville during the Independence Day weekend. He will be running in the 100-meter and 4 x 100 events. James will be a senior this upcoming school year and hopes to attain an athletic scholarship to attend college.

We would like to acknowledge and thank Wilma Wiley, CM4, and Victor Wharton, CM2, for sharing with us the wonderful accomplishments of this young man. We wish him the very best.

DCS Appoints New Personnel Director

Submitted by William Haynes, Executive Director, Human Resources Development

Dezanne Russell was appointed as DCS personnel director on June 16, 2005. The Personnel Division is a major support unit within the agency responsible for the hiring, promotion and separations of employees across the state. The division also has responsibility for the administration of employee benefits, personnel records administration, coordination of human resources related training and the monitoring of leave and attendance.

Russell began her career in state government working for the Tennessee House of Representatives, Office of the Chief Clerk during the 96th and 98th General Assemblies. She was appointed staff attorney in 1993 for the Department of Youth Development and served in this role until the creation of Department of Children's Services in 1996, when she transitioned to an assistant general counsel position. The following year she was offered the opportunity to organize and establish the DCS Administrative Procedures Division, which she managed and served as the administrative Judge, hearing fair hearings before the Department and as the Commissioner's designee for Level IV hearings. Recruited back to the DCS Office of the General Counsel, she served as the lead assistant general counsel for legal issues related to areas of employment, juvenile justice and legislation. In 2002, she was promoted to attorney 4/senior counsel in the Office of the General Counsel and, most recently, was appointed as DCS Director of Personnel.

Russell holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from Christian Brothers University and a Doctor of Jurisprudence from Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis. She was admitted to the bar in Tennessee in October 1992.

“DCS is fortunate to have someone of Ms. Russell’s caliber in this key position,” said William Haynes, executive director of human resources management. “She possesses a combination of strong leadership skills, knowledge of the personnel system and legal experience, which should serve her well in her new role.”

Lake County Schools Lauds DCS Northwest Education Specialist

Submitted by Mary Meador, Director, Education

Ray Allison, supervisor of Lake County Schools, recently sent a letter of appreciation and thanks to the DCS education division. His letter is a testament to the work that the agency performs and reflects how integral our work is with community stakeholders – and especially how the efforts of even one employee, in this case education specialist Joy Olexa, can make a world of difference.

The content of his May 26, 2005 letter follows:

On Tuesday, August 3, 2004, Joy Olexa spoke to all of the teachers and administrators in the Lake County School System as part of a professional development activity. Ms. Olexa’s presentation was very professional and informative. During the hour, she discussed such topics as foster care, children in state custody, cooperation between the school system and the Department of Children’s Services, developing an IEP for students, and developing special services for children. The information she provided was very valuable and clear, concise answers. As a result of this presentation, our school system has a much stronger, more productive working relationship with DCS. Her enthusiasm for her work acts as a motivating factor for our teachers. Ms. Olexa is certainly a valuable asset for DCS.

Throughout the school year, Ms. Olexa has worked with us on some difficult cases and has provided some valuable insight. We appreciate her enthusiasm and dedication. Her understanding of the way school systems function has helped us work through some difficult problems.

Thank you for such a dedicated person to serve as a valuable resource for our system.

*Ray Allison
Supervisor, Lake County Schools*

Olexa feels a special sense of gratitude for the support and involvement of Lake County Schools. “I cannot capture how grateful I am for all the support and cooperation Lake County staff has given to me. All I want for my students is for them to be treated fair and given the best, which is always the case in Lake County,” Olexa said.

Cross-Functional Team Update

The purpose of a cross-functional team is to bring together a diverse group of people to channel their creative and innovative ideas to identify, solve, and implement systemic changes within an organization. With a cross-functional team, the intention is to include a diverse group of people that reaches beyond the department and extends into the community, where the varied experiences and combined knowledge of the participants can provide an optimal mix of unlimited perspectives and collective expertise. When focusing on a problem or an issue, this type of group, composed of stakeholders, would ideally be able to view various ways to approach an issue and settle on the most effective means to accomplish the goal. In many ways, cross-functional teams and child and family team meetings are similar in this respect. This concept can actually be seen as a philosophy as well as a process.

There is specific protocol governing a cross-functional team that is designed to maintain the team's productivity and integrity. Team members are urged to incorporate the four principles of DCS into every interaction; they are asked to select team members who have expertise on the specific issues at hand, meetings are scheduled for specific times – and this time table is maintained, agendas are developed and disbursed prior to the meeting, minutes of the meeting are recorded, and each person is urged to participate and provide feedback. A team facilitator is chosen by the team and is responsible for the general operations of the team. A regional representative is appointed by the regional administrator and is responsible for coordinating and reporting all cross-functional activities to the state office cross-functional team. Regional cross-functional teams generally meet once monthly and the regional representatives of those teams meet by polycom once monthly with the state office cross-functional team to provide an update on their activities.

Our first cross-functional team had its inception in Memphis in October 2004 when a group of DCS staff and private providers came together with the goal of significantly reducing the number of backlog cases of children in DCS custody whose permanency goal was adoption. 85 of the 90 children identified were actually finalized for adoption by the end of December 2004 as a result of this effort.

Energized by such a great start, the concept of cross-functional teams was rolled out, region by region. A PowerPoint presentation was added to the first meeting of each region as a way to impart the basic concept of the workings of a cross-functional team. On each occasion, after having been invited to the first meeting, community partners and DCS staff alike began working together to address various issues. Each regional team seems to have its own unique way of obtaining the desired outcome, however, each always begins by:

- Identifying its purpose
- Deciding on performance goals
- Listing desired outcomes
- Identifying barriers and strategies for success
- Providing an action plan
- Defining a timeline for implementation and resolution

Some specific accomplishments and activities of our regional cross-functional teams give evidence to the creative and innovative ideas and dedication of their members. For example, recruitment of resource parents is one of the most frequently addressed goals. Strategies to deal with this range from offering incentives for the recruitment of new resource parents to conducting a parade through areas of town where the most need for resource families exists.

Several teams have tackled the issue of the retention of resource homes. One strategy involves private providers working together to provide a crisis 800-number and man it 24/7 so that existing resource parents can call in case of an emergency. Some regions are working on providing mentors for resource parents.

One region used its cross-functional team interchangeably with its implementation plan team. Several regions have begun to work with private providers to lessen the backlog of home studies and to share PATH training classes for both DCS and private provider resource families.

We still have some challenges to face in order to reach optimum utilization of each team. For instance, some regions are finding it difficult to include participants such as resource parents and children in custody, as well as court staff and education specialists, due to the rural nature of their regions and the fact that meetings necessarily tend to take place during work hours. These are some of our barriers, however, which will no doubt be tackled by teams in creative and innovative ways. Cross-functional teams are, after-all, works in progress, and we're just beginning.

Child Protective Services – Climbing to the Summit

Submitted by Denise Alexander, Director, Child Protective Services

“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.”

This quote by T. S. Eliot is from a poster I had in my cubicle during my first seven years in CPS and foster care. It was the caption below a picture of a man standing at the summit of a mountain. Sometimes when I would get discouraged or overwhelmed, I would look at the poster and read the quote again to remind myself that we often sell ourselves short regarding what we can actually accomplish if we look beyond the barriers. It's easy to get overwhelmed and discouraged at times, especially in CPS.

A deadline was set to have zero overdue cases by June 30. Six months ago, this seemed like a huge mountain. Now, several regions are at the summit with others right behind them. It's been a hard journey but one that everyone involved should be proud for contributing. The sacrifices made have been tremendous and the teamwork across counties and regions has been energizing.

It is very exciting to be a part of Child Protective Services in Tennessee. I'm proud to be part of the statewide effort to make CPS a model program. We are identifying outcomes and measures to determine where we are as a program, our strengths and areas of need. As I travel across the

state, I hear staff talking about the same outcomes and the different ways they are being accomplished in each region. Slowly, but surely, you are making progress in improving our program.

Here are some of the accomplishments we have made since January 2005:

- Overdue cases have been reduced tremendously and continue to decline daily.
- Development of a Team Excellence — CPS representatives from each region that meet face to face monthly to discuss critical CPS issues and provide input regarding them. They bring the field perspective and input to the crucial decision being made in CPS at the Central Office level.
- Multiple Response legislation was passed in June. In the coming months, we are going to embark on a new way of doing business in CPS.
- Structured Decision Making was implemented across the state, hopefully improving our ability to make screening and response decisions, evaluate risk and safety assessments, as well as make more consistent decisions.
- Centralized Intake was implemented statewide as of May 2005.
- Every region developed regional implementation plans with CPS outcomes as a part of the plan. Team Excellence as well as other CPS representatives participated in the short and long term plans for CPS in their respective regions.
- Laptop computers are being deployed to every CPS staff that has requested one and needs one.
- New monthly CPS newsletter.
- CPS policy is currently being revised. Policy revisions are based on The DCS Practice Model, input from the field and Team Excellence.
- Satellite trainings were produced during the spring with topics significant to CPS investigations.
- New Central Office CPS staff has been added, including:

Marjahna Hart, a graduate of the University of Tennessee College of Social Work. She has master's degrees in social work and education. Her credentials include CMSW and she is a member of NASW. She brings a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to the CPS program. She is originally from Jackson, Tenn., where she worked at Pathways Behavioral Health Center as a court liaison. She has recently moved to Nashville.

Carol Wilkin, who has an extensive history with Children's Services. She began as a case manager in Rutherford County and was a team leader in the South Central region and a member of the Special Assist team before transferring to Central Office as the FCIP coordinator. She left that position for three years with Mid-Cumberland Community Services Agency, but returned to Central Office to help with program and policy development. Besides writing new policy, she will assist with the program development and implementation.

There are many other mountains to climb in CPS before we reach our "ultimate summit" of a stronger program. Given the courage, tenacity, commitment, passion and teamwork that have

been displayed over the past months, I have confidence that this time next year we will be astonished at the progress we've made.



It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men. – Frederick Douglas

